DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 061 860 48 FL 003 218

AUTHOR	Williamsen, Vern G.
TITLE	A Pilot Program in Teaching Spanish: An Intensive Approach. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Westminster Coll., Fulton, Mo.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
BUREAU NO	BR-7-8186
PUB DATE	Jun 68
CONTRACT	OEC-3-7-078186-3126
NOTE	14p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Average Students; *Educational Experiments; *Intensive Language Courses; Language Skills; Modern Languages; *Second Language Learning; Spanish; Statistical Analysis; Tables (Data); *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This document describes an educational experiment designed to test the proposition that language learning can best be carried on through a program of maximum exposure in the least possible time. An experimental class of 19 average students participated in an eight-week intensive course consisting of four half-hour laboratory sessions; there were two hours of home study in the evening. The students lived in dormitories with other students following the same course. Weekends were left for recreation. Tests administered to the experimental group and a control group before and after the course provide statistics for comparison. The small number of students involved in the research is not sufficient to prove the initial proposition, but further research on the hypothesis is recommended. (VM)

ED 061860

NDEA Title VI Section b
PA-48

JUL 24 1968

FINAL REPORT
Project No. 7-8186
Contract No. H-OEC-3-7-078186-3126

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Vern G. Williamsen

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Westminster College

Fulton, Missouri

INTRODUCTION[1]

A basic question of great import to all liberal arts colleges was posed by Homer D. Babbidge in a recent article: ("Thoughts for the Future", MLJ, XlIX, 1, p. 18), "Are we wise to require the study of a modern foreign language of all liberal arts students when we are not prepared to follow through to that level of understanding that alone makes language meaningful in the context of the liberal arts?". As much as the developments of the past twenty years may have resulted in changes of methods and a consequent improvement in the results obtained by those teachers of modern foreign languages who have used them, there remains much to be desired. To become assured of the weaknesses that still exist one need only witness tne recent flood of articles disputing anew the relative merits of one mothod over another. It seems that no one is yet completely satisfied with the results obtained by the shift of emphasis to a more orally based language program. This is in spite of the great hopes that all have had since the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) before World War II first began to develop linguistically oriented materials and methods for the teaching of what were then considered "unusual" languages. Then, when the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) used these as a basis for their successful work during the war, it was expected that the application of the principles involved would revive the almost defunct field of modern language teaching.

The ASTP directives provided for the following principles to be observed: (1) a large number of instructional hours in a relatively short period of time; (2) a small number of students per class; (3) a combination of presentation of language structure and conversational practice; (4) an emphasis on drill and on the formation of linguistic habits; (5) phonemic analysis and transcription; (6) the employment of native informants; (7) a specific objective: command of the colloquial form of the language (reading was to come as a normal by-product). In adapting these principles to classroom use, it was discovered that the public school and the college programs were unable to follow them completely. They were lacking in at least six factors that had made the ASTP successful in accomplishing its aim: (1) the army's nine months were equal to six years of classroom instructional time. (2) Financial considerations imposed larger classes upon them than those used in the ASTP. (3) The schools lacked the superbly trained teachers the the ASTP had at its

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disposal. (4) They did not have the up-to-date equipment of the ASTP. (5) They did not have the highly selected "student body" that the ASTP encompassed. (6) They were not able to concentrate on the language to the exclusion of all else, as in the ASTP. (UNESCO, The National Interest and Foreign Languages, U.S. Department of State, 1957, p. 60). Various programs have led to solutions or near solutions for most of the above problems: long range, six-year secondary school programs, materials designed for use with larger classes, NDEA grants for the purchase of modern equipment, NDEA institutes for training teachers, etc. But seemingly, the only attempts American colleges have made to utilize the first principle of the ASTP directive has been in the field of teaching the "exotic" languages. The Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State, however, has carried the work forward and done so successfully by discarding some of the elements of the ASTP which were unproductive or which, due to the development of new texts and materials have been outmoded.

In their attempts to reach the level of understanding and use that is desirable for a student of modern language, the colleges have tried to preserve the traditional course pattern of instruction. The language departments of many colleges teaching mainly French, German, and Spanish have tried to make use of: (1) newer methods and materials such as the Integrated Linguistic Approach (Audio-Lingual), the language laboratory, and the new text book materials which as the result of much thought and some experimentation have become available, (2) an increased number of hours spent in class and in laboratory practice periods during the semester-long standard course, and (3) attempts either to individualize or to program the learning processes such as in F. Rand Morton's experiments with new laboratory materials at Lindenwood College, Thomas Stevens' work at Culver-Stockton College to place students in a multi-track system, or in Theodore Mueller's work in teaching sound discrimination through a programmed course. None, however, reach the levels of contact hours indicated as required for a functional mastery of the language. The three schools which were in July, 1963, reorganized as the Defense Language Institutes reported the following: the FSI indicated 600 hours as necessary to reach a functional level in Spanish, the Army Language School reported the figure to be 590 hours, and the Navy Language School, 570.

No published results of any experiment, conducted according to scientific standards of control, have shown a greater achievement which could truly be placed at the feet of methodology than could be explained as well by the increased time spent. To the contrary, all better results seem to be directly related either to an increase of contact hours or to the bias and the interest of the teacher rather

than to the superiority of one or another method of instruction. A new question then occurs quite naturally. Have we really put into practice in these "new" college courses the principles proved to be effective for teaching languages successfully in the various service-connected schools? Does there not still remain to be tested the one area which the colleges seem never to have been able to test, perhaps because of some imagined impossibility of scheduling, that of trying to teach the target language and nothing else in a single concentrated and intensive effort?

Unfortunately for one who is trying to review the literature about experiments of this nature (as applied to beginning students) there seems to have been little done in the field of the "common" languages. There are some reports concerning the intensive training given to teachers in the NDEA institutes, a rather full summary of the intensive programs used for training students in the "uncommon" languages, and some reports about the advantages enjoyed by the culturally immersed student. All such reports, however glowing they may be in regard to the results achieved by the intensive approach, deal with materials, students, and languages entirely different from those which were the concern of this pilot program. The main difference to be noted is that all such institutes and intensive courses deal with highly motivated and/or experienced individuals while the program reported here attempted to apply modern principles and intensive techniques to the language learning process for the "average" student.

METHOD

Program. Nineteen student participants pursued a course of study planned as an integrated unit. The students studied nothing but the target language for a period of eight weeks and lived in a dormitory with other students following the same course. The classes were conducted on a daily basis with four fifty-minute instructional periods each day and four one-half hour laboratory sessions. Two of the longer periods were devoted to basic instruction, grammatical explanations, and practice with the language patterns involved. For the first two weeks of the program one fifty-minute period daily was used to study basic linguistic principles of language learning. This same period was later spent in a program of cultural materials, read and discussed in Spanish, which formed a basis for pattern drills, principally of a review nature, other than those presented in the basic program. The final fifty-minute period each day was turned over to a study of other cultural materials, the study of Spanish pronunciation, and to the memorization of Spanish songs and poetry. The students were aided in the

evening study hours (approximately two hours of such "home" study were assigned each day) by trained student assistants who were housed in the same dormitory with them. The total number of contact hours then was maintained at approximately the level experienced by students in a normal first year program (300). The students were freed from all assignments on the week-ends during the program and were encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity for recreation. It was felt that this would tend to give the summer's program a more normal tone than could otherwise be managed. As a result of the concentrated nature of this program, college credit was granted to the student participants relative to their level of achievement at the conclusion of the program compared to that at their entrance into the program.

Sample. The control group for this program consisted of all men who completed first and second year classes in Spanish at Westminster College during the school years 1965-66 and 1966-67. Because the college, a church-related liberal arts institution for men, has a language requirement which in most cases must be met during the first two years of a student's residence, the contorl group was, in general, made up of freshman and sophomore students in the college. The total number of students involved in the control group was 195 but complete data were not available on all. Lack of complete data reflects a student's failure to complete the course or examination being reported, his withdrawal from the college, his placement into advanced sections or courses unpon entering Westminster College as a freshman, or his entrance into Westminster College as a transfer student from another institution.

The test group was limited to students presently enrolled in the college who needed to study in the summer period to complete their language requirment and to incoming freshman and transfer students. The proportions of such students was generally the same as in the regular school year classes (control group) although it may have leaned toward the inclusion of more of those students who had already failed in one or more attempts to master a foreign language during the school year. The test group numbered nineteen students. Complete data were available on all except two transfer students for whom no College Entrance Examination Board (SAT) scores were available.

Non-measured Variables. In any program such as this there are always several variable factors which are difficult to assess: staff, texts, and facilities. Here again every effort was made to obtain homogeneity between the two groups and the experiences that thery were to have. The teaching staff for the summer (test) group consisted of two professors, the only members of the modern language department to teach

Spanish full time. Each had in his charge a group of participants using the same text used in his classes during the school year. All participants, however, came into classroom contact with both instructors at some time during the day. The laboratory staff was made up, just as during the school year, by student assistants who were regularly employed as such during the school year. The same classroom and housing facilities were used as would be used in the regular session with no special "gimmicks" added for the occasion.

Measured Variables. Several different measures often used to predict student capabilities and performance were used in order to study the measurable differences existing between the two groups. The following were used in this study:

I. The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT)
   1. Number Learning (NL), a measure of auditory memory.
   2. Phonetic Script (PS), a measure of the ability to relate sounds to symbols.
   3. Spelling Clues (SC), a measure of English language vocabulary.
   4. Words in Sentences (WS), a measure of the ability to understand grammatical relationships and principles.
   5. Paired Associates (PA), a measure of immediate rote memory.
   6. Total Score (T).

II. A record of the foreign language or languages studied in High School.

III. The College Entrance Examination Board Scores.
   1. SAT-Verbal.
   2. SAT-Math.

In order to test the Spanish language achievement of the control group, the MLA Cooperative Spanish Language Examination (Level L) was given at the end of the second semester of study and the Level M of that examination was administered at the end of the fourth semester of study or its equivalent. All four subtests, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, of these examinations were given. All student participants were given the Level L examination at the end of the eight week summer session and twelve of the better students as gauged by that examination and the recommendation of the instructors were given the Level M examination.

RESULTS

In noting the results of the various tests and of a study of the records used to compare the two groups, it should be recognized that because of the number of cases involved, a t-test of 1.96 or less indicates a probability

at the five per cent level of confidence (p .05) that the groups are not significantly different.

Table 1
MODERN LANGUAGE APTITUDE TEST

	Control group (N-109)		Test group (N-19)		
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	t
NL	28.4	8.7	32.5	9.1	1.84
PS	22.7	4.3	22.6	3.5	.24
SC	16.4	7.4	17.0	6.9	.34
WS	23.3	6.5	18.8	5.9	3.00
PA	15.8	5.6	15.1	6.4	.42
T	111.1	21.3	105.7	19.4	1.11

Table 2
HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE

	Control group (N-195)	Test group (N-19)
French	12%	16%
German	2%	5%
Latin	35%	42%
Spanish	63%	47%
None	8%	11%

Table 3
COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD

	Control group (N-181)		Test group (N-17)		
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	t
SAT-V	482.3	76.22	458.4	57.0	1.69
SAT-M	525.4	79.11	497.0	56.0	2.05

Table 4
MLA SPANISH TEST, FORM L

	Control group (N-115)		Test group (N-19)		
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	t
Listening	152.1	8.3	152.5	11.1	.15
Speaking	169.2	12.8	167.8	15.4	.48
Reading	155.0	8.4	154.6	11.7	.14
Writing	155.9	7.2	156.0	9.2	.05

Table 5
MLA SPANISH TEST, FORM M

	Control group (N-99)		Test group (N-12)		
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	t
Listening	155.7	10.2	156.8	12.7	1.40
Speaking	176.4	13.1	182.0	12.5	1.55
Reading	161.5	8.9	160.3	8.3	.46
Writing	159.9	9.3	164.6	5.6	2.51

Table 6
TEST GROUP, MAY, 1968 - FORM M

	Form MA, August 1967				Form MB, May 1968			
Student	L	S	R	W	L	S	R	W
a	155	190	155	160	152	175	142	145
b	141	171	156	168	152	164	156	152
c	158	182	155	159	159	172	159	154
d	158	188	155	168	152	169	152	152
e	164	193	167	163	157	178	161	158
f	162	194	160	169	169	187	170	160
g	144	187	154	163	159	167	168	163
h	188	220	185	175	187	193	185	173
i	160	198	162	167	157	175	164	153
j	160	185	177	163	160	178	177	156
mean	159	191	163	166	160	176	163	157

DISCUSSION

Modern Language Aptitude Test (Table 1). The score of 111.1 which was the mean total for the control group corresponds to the fortieth percentile rank for male college freshman as given by the authors of the test. However, they also show that the male college freshman studying Spanish shows a mean of 104.6 with a standard deviation of 21.9. This seems more like the results that were obtained with the test group. The discrepancy can be accounted for by the difference in the scores for one of the subtests, Words in Sentences (WS), which is also the only portion of the examination in which the two groups were significantly different. Since it was not known until late in the second semester of the school year 1966-67 that the pilot program would be carried out as planned, the MLAT was not administered until that time. Some 32% of the students who took the test then were sophomore or juniors in the second year of Spanish study. This difference, it follows, may be due to the increased language sophistication of those students who had had at least one semester of study in a foreign language at the college level. It could also be accounted for simply by the relative maturity of the students in the control group as compared with the younger incoming freshmen of the test group.

High School Language (Table 2). The percentage figures show a remarkable similarity of language background for the two groups. A t-statistic based on the data for the Spanish percentages, in which the greatest disparity exists, results in a figure of 1.92 indicating that there was no reason, even with this numerical difference, to believe the two groups to be dissimilar.

College Entrance Examination Board Scores (Table 3). As far as verbal ability goes there was no significant difference between the groups but for some reason the two groups were not alike in their mathematical ability. This is of especial interest because, of the two scores, the math score is the one to show a relatively high coefficient of correlation with a student's success in a foreign language (David Payne and Harold Vaughn, "Forecasting Italian Language Proficiency of Culturally Immersed Students", MLJ, LI, 1, January 1967, 5). Even though the groups were not alike in this category, the dissimilarity could have had no adverse effect upon the findings of this program since the control group was the group which scored the higher of the two. Therefore any significance that this score may have would only serve to point to the relative weakness of the test group.

MLA Spanish Test, Form L (Table 4). One fact worthy of note in these scores is their similarity not only to each other but to the norms as set up by the makers of the examination. The principal difference between the two scales as shown here is that the control group shows a tendency to cluster more closely about the mean than does the test group. The latter group shows a curve more nearly approximating the norm. For comparison's sake, the norms for this test for first year college students are: Listening, mean 154, s.d. 11; Speaking, mean 161, s.d. 14; Reading, mean 156, s.d. 11; Writing, mean 157, s.d. 9.

For the sake of testing further the effectiveness of the pilot program, twelve of the students from the test group were administered the Form M of the Cooperative Spanish Examination. These twelve were selected students whose level of achievement, it was felt, might be more properly measured on this test rather than on the more elementary Form L which was given to all.

MLA Spanish Test, Form M (Table 5). In making any comparisons between these scores, it must be kept in mind that the test group in this case was a highly selected group. The lowest level of the group was eliminated from this particular test. Therefore we might expect a greater variance in the t-statistics for the two groups than that observed in studying the results from the level L examination. Such was the case; however, the only score which shows a significant difference is that for the Writing portion of

the test in which the test group did notably better than the control group, a group which had completed four semesters of college work in Spanish. Again for comparison, the national norms for the second year of college work on this examination are: Listening, mean 164, s.d. 15; Speaking, mean 176, s.d. 19; Reading, mean 168, s.d. 14; Writing, mean 162, s.d. 10.

Test Group-May, 1968 (Table 6). This table reflects the work of ten of the twelve students who took the Form M examination in August, 1967, and who continued in the program during the school year 1967-1968. One of the twelve original students was not permitted to enroll for the fall semester at Westminster College because of a poor scholastic record during the year 1966-1967; another withdrew from school to enter the armed forces. A study of the table will show that there was no significant difference in the scores achieved by the students of the test group after a year of forther study in regular third year Spanish classes. A lower mean score on the Speaking test probably reflects the shift from the audio-lingually centered approach of the summer program to the lecture-reading approach of the third year class work.

Of the seven students who did not take the Form M examination in August of 1967, one did not continue in the program because of a proven low ability to learn language, one withdrew from the program for health reasons, one left school to enter the armed forces, and one withdrew from school because of a change in his educational objective. The three who did continue in the program, studying Spanish at an appropriate level, all failed the courses they were studying both semesters; however, one of the three was able to achieve at a minimal level on the departmental examination and has been excused from further language study. The other two will not be permitted to re-enroll in the college this fall because of poor over-all academic records.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The tests show that there existed a very real homogeneity between the control and the test groups. Where they were not alike, the difference was in favor of the control group being a more able group of students than the test group.

2. In eight weeks all nineteen of the participating students achieved results equal to those reached by students of the control group at the end of the first year of college study in Spanish. Twelve of the test group of students, about 60% of the total, showed results equal to or better than those shown by the control group at the end of four semesters of college study. This si true in spite of the fact that the test group experieinced only twenty more contact hours with the language in the course of the summer

program than the control group had during the first two semesters alone of their college work.

3. Because it was recognized that extensive practice with the newly acquired language would be required if retention of the gain made by an intensive presentation were to be assured, all participating students in the test group were required to register for a Spanish course at the appropriate level each semester for the school year 1967-1968. Only thirteen of the nineteen students were actually able to complete this work. Follow-up tests given to these students show no appreciable gain or loss as a result of this enforced year's study. It should also be noted that of the seven students who did poorly during the course of the summer program only one will register for continued college work in the fall of 1968 indicating thatsome other selective factor than those tested may have been operative in their "failure".

4. Because of the small number of cases we cannot as yet accept the proposition upon which this pilot program was based -- that language learning could best be carried on through a program of maximum exposure in the last possible time -- as having been adequately proved. It is believed, nevertheless, that this program has demonstrated quite well the advisability of testing further that hypothesis. If the point can be shown to be valid, it may well point the way by which the liberal arts college can finally and logically call upon every student to learn a foreign language by insuring that he can ". . . follow through to that level of understanding that alone makes language meaningful in the context of the liberal arts."

SUMMARY

The pilot program, the results of which are reported here, was designed to test the hypothesis that the maximum benefit from foreign language instruction could be achieved by a program stressing the highest degree of exposure in the least possible time. Therefore a group of students was selected to study Spanish for a period of eight weeks with four hours a day of formal instruction, two hours daily in laboratory practice (in four one-half hour sessions), and two hours daily in directed study and practice. The test group was administered a modern language aptitude test and records were kept on their previous language study experiences and on their College Entrance Examination Board scores. Similar data were gathered on the students in the regular school year program over a period of three years. Statistical analyses of these data showed no significant differences between the two groups. At the conclusion of the instructional program, achievement tests in Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing skills were adminstered to the students. Again statistical analyses showed no significant differences between the achievement of the test group and that of the control group at the end of two years of study. The implication of this preliminary study is certainly that the hypothesis should be tested further with larger and therefore more statistically meaningful groups.

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